Teachings of Diogenes

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Contents

Life of Diogenes.....1

Teachings of Diogenes.....8

About Wealth and Values.....10

Food and Eating.....11

Cynic Openess.....12

Begging.....13

Victory.....15

Swimming against the stream.....16

Dog.....18

The Folly of Empty Pursuits.....18

Cultivating Inner Virtue.....19

Hollow Rhetoric.....21

Plato.....21

Chains of Wealth.....23

The Chains of Appetite.....24

Love.....25

Diogenes on Sexuality and Self-Control.....26

Body.....26

Miscellaneous sayings.....27

Religion.....28

About Superstition.....29

About Gods.....29

Diogenes and the Orators.....30

Philip of Macedon.....31

Alexander the Great.....32

Dionysios of Syracuse.....33

The Enslavement.....34

Diogenes the Mentor.....35

Moralistic Sayings.....35

On the Value of Wisdom and Learning.....37

Allies and Adversaries.....38

About Journeys.....39

Reflections of a Cynic Sage.....39

The Illusions of Wealth and Status.....40

Humor.....41

Witty remarks.....41

- Aging.....44
- Suicide.....44
- Death and Burial.....44

Life of Diogenes

Diogenes of Sinope, often known simply as "Diogenes the Cynic," is one of the most unconventional and provocative figures in ancient philosophy. Living in the 4th century BCE, Diogenes became one of the founders of Cynicism, a school of thought that valued virtue and wisdom over wealth and societal status. His life story, full of daring, defiance, and unorthodox choices, provides a window into his philosophy—a philosophy rooted in rejecting artificial conventions and living a life of rugged simplicity, guided by natural reason and virtue.

Diogenes was born in Sinope, a city on the Black Sea coast, around 412 or 404 BCE. His journey into Cynicism began in a rather unusual way: he and his father were reportedly involved in a scandal related to the debasement of currency, leading to their exile from Sinope. Moving to Athens, Diogenes embraced a life that was as radical as it was minimalistic. He lived without possessions, rejected the comforts of material wealth, and famously slept in a large ceramic jar—or pithos—in the marketplace, living as close to nature as possible. This choice reflected his belief that one should live according to nature and not be constrained by societal expectations or conventions.

Diogenes's interactions with others often involved mockery or irony, as he believed that direct confrontation with society's flaws was necessary to teach others. His encounters with the wealthy, the powerful, and the self-important became legendary. He was known to have walked around with a lantern in broad daylight, claiming he was "searching for an honest man." This act was a symbolic critique of human hypocrisy and dishonesty, challenging others to question their own integrity. Diogenes's brazen behavior and sharp wit earned him the reputation of a "philosophical dog," and he took pride in this moniker, considering it a compliment rather than an insult. He would bark, bite back at hypocrisy, and even publicly shame those who failed to live according to their own stated principles.

Diogenes's teachings were often delivered through paradoxical sayings and actions meant to shock his audience into self-reflection. His philosophy can be summed up as a relentless pursuit of truth and virtue, with little regard for societal approval or conventional morality. His principles of self-sufficiency, plain-speaking, and disdain for materialism were meant to awaken others to the simple joys of living free from unnecessary desires.

One of Diogenes's core ideas was "autarkeia" or self-sufficiency. He believed that true happiness and freedom could only be achieved by fulfilling one's basic needs while avoiding unnecessary desires. By living in such a way, one would be immune to misfortunes and free from dependency on others. In one of his teachings, Diogenes pointed out that people spend much on material things, like pouring oil into lamps to see what's on the table, yet often neglect to spend time gaining wisdom, which illuminates life itself. For Diogenes, wisdom and self-control were the true "wealth," far superior to gold or possessions.

Diogenes also saw himself as a social critic, using his actions and words to challenge people to think about their choices. He remarked on education, comparing it to a golden crown that, while valuable and often costly, brings true honor only if one seeks wisdom, not just status. Through his sharp words and deeds, he urged Athenians to reflect on their superficial values.

Diogenes's life was a continual demonstration of his philosophy, challenging not only individual behaviors but also societal norms and values. In Athens, he quickly gained a reputation as a provocateur, openly questioning the practices of orators, philosophers, and common citizens alike. He believed that the so-called "civilized" practices of Athenian society masked human hypocrisy and vanity. To him, social conventions—like the pursuit of wealth, power, and reputation—were distractions from the simple life of virtue and self-sufficiency.

One of Diogenes's more infamous encounters was with Alexander the Great. As the story goes, Alexander sought out Diogenes in Corinth, intrigued by his reputation for wisdom and disregard for authority. When Alexander found him sunbathing, he introduced himself grandly and offered to grant Diogenes any wish he desired. Diogenes, unphased by the power before him, merely replied, "Stand out of my light." This bold reply encapsulates Diogenes's perspective: he valued personal freedom and natural simplicity over any material reward or powerful association. According to legend, Alexander, moved by this encounter, remarked, "If I were not Alexander, I would be Diogenes," highlighting the philosopher's freedom from societal constraints.

Diogenes's teachings also offered a critique of the prevailing moral standards. He believed that people's behavior often betrayed a lack of self-discipline and moral integrity. To him, virtues such as honesty, humility, and resilience were the highest standards to live by, and he judged others by their adherence to these ideals. His disdain for the hollow pursuit of reputation, for example, was evident in his interactions with orators and politicians, whom he often mocked as "lackeys of the crowd" and hypocrites who preached virtues in speeches but failed to practice them. Diogenes felt that true virtue lay in action, not words, and that one should live out their philosophy rather than discuss it in abstract terms.

A significant aspect of Diogenes's approach to life was his rejection of possessions. He considered material wealth not only unnecessary but also detrimental to the soul's development. To him, owning many things only increased a person's worries, made them susceptible to misfortune, and reduced their independence. In his own life, he kept his possessions to an absolute minimum, famously discarding even his drinking cup after seeing a boy drink water from his hands. This story, whether entirely factual or not, demonstrates Diogenes's commitment to living in complete harmony with nature. He often argued that animals live without the complexities of human society, following their instincts and natural needs, and he encouraged others to do the same, shedding the false values imposed by society.

Diogenes's stance on education reflects his desire for a grounded, practical approach to learning. Unlike other philosophers, who often devoted their studies to abstract theories and complex rhetoric, Diogenes believed that education should cultivate character and virtue, not just intellectual ability. He viewed intellectual pursuits as valuable only if they served a real purpose in one's life. He compared books to bones: one should take what is nourishing and discard the rest. His focus on practical wisdom led him to criticize teachers who failed to live by their own teachings, comparing them to "lyres" that can make beautiful sounds but lack awareness of the music they produce. For Diogenes, wisdom was not something to be discussed in theory but something to be embodied and practiced.

Another area where Diogenes's beliefs diverged sharply from mainstream society was in his views on relationships and social bonds. Diogenes valued friendship, especially friendships that encouraged virtue, and he argued that true friends should provide honest criticism and support each other's pursuit of the good life. He believed that a friend should be "one soul in two bodies" and that genuine friendship was a rare bond formed out of shared values rather than convenience or superficial affection. Diogenes also believed that friendship was strengthened by moral integrity. When asked how one should exact revenge on an enemy, he replied that becoming a good and honest person was the best way to shame those who sought to harm you.

Diogenes's critique of luxury was among his most notable and provocative. To him, luxury and excess were not signs of success but of moral weakness. He observed that the pursuit of wealth and comfort distracted people from cultivating their virtues and becoming self-reliant. For instance, he compared rich but unwise men to "golden sheep" and criticized those who invested their energy in decorating themselves or their homes rather than nurturing their minds. His encounters with wealthy citizens often served as public lessons on the futility of wealth. When visiting the home of a rich man adorned with extravagant furnishings, he reportedly spat in the man's face, saying he couldn't find a place more worthy of disdain.

In another incident, he entered a luxurious house and spat on the floor after being warned not to sully anything in the room. His point was clear: the obsession with appearances and material things blinded people to true worth, which he believed lay in one's character, resilience, and moral clarity. Diogenes argued that a life free from luxury and possessions allowed one to focus on self-improvement, unhindered by the distractions and dependencies wealth often brings. He even argued that reliance on material comfort made individuals weaker and more susceptible to misfortune, while simplicity and self-reliance gave a person inner strength and freedom.

Beyond his critique of wealth, Diogenes frequently challenged the Athenians' superstitious beliefs and religious practices. He was openly skeptical of prayers, sacrifices, and ceremonies that he saw as hypocritical or inconsistent with a life of virtue. For example, he observed that people often prayed for good health while indulging in practices that were harmful to their bodies. Similarly, he mocked the Athenians' offerings and sacrifices to the gods, suggesting that if such rituals were effective, there would be no sickness or misfortune in the world. Diogenes believed that people should focus less on seeking favor from the gods and more on taking personal responsibility for their actions and choices.

Despite his irreverence for traditional beliefs, Diogenes did not deny the value of hope, perseverance, and wisdom. He argued that these qualities were far more precious than any religious ceremony or offering. To him, hope was a guiding force in life, the "most precious thing," as he once said, helping individuals overcome hardships. He also believed that self-awareness was the most challenging task a person could undertake, as people often deceive themselves with self-importance. His advice on knowing oneself was simple: look within, confront one's flaws, and discard the illusions that lead to hypocrisy and vanity.

Diogenes's emphasis on resilience extended to his views on pain and suffering. He believed that physical discomfort and misfortune were not inherently evil but rather tests of one's inner strength. When he was captured by pirates and sold into slavery, Diogenes reportedly accepted his fate calmly, remarking that he could still govern men, even in chains. He later became the teacher and caretaker of his master's children, educating them in his Cynic

principles, which included endurance, simplicity, and self-discipline. His philosophy taught that circumstances do not define a person; instead, it is their response to adversity that reveals their true character.

As he aged, Diogenes did not retreat from his principles. Rather, he seemed to embrace them more intensely, showing his commitment to his beliefs even as he approached death. When asked about his failing health and nearing end, he famously remarked that a true philosopher does not fear death but accepts it as a natural part of life. To Diogenes, death was neither to be feared nor lamented; he often made light of it, instructing his friends to discard his body like any other refuse, leaving it to be devoured by animals if they chose. His disregard for the pomp and ceremony of burial reflected his belief that one's legacy lay in their actions and character, not in any monument or grave.

Diogenes's view of education extended to his approach to mentoring. Unlike traditional educators, who taught through structured lessons, he favored hands-on experiences that taught practical wisdom. Diogenes believed that children, like clay, should be molded early, as they would later "set" in their ways. He emphasized self-sufficiency, endurance, and simplicity as essential lessons, teaching his students to rely on themselves and live without dependence on luxury. His education also included physical training to build resilience, as he believed that the body and mind were connected, each reinforcing the other's strength and discipline.

In friendships and social interactions, Diogenes valued honesty over flattery. He believed that true friends should challenge and improve each other, not seek comfort in shallow affirmations. He often spoke against flattery, likening it to "choking honey," as sweet words could distort reality and encourage vice. To him, a friend should offer constructive criticism, acting as a mirror for the other's flaws, which he believed was the highest form of friendship. Through this tough love, he felt friends could grow and improve each other's character, fostering a genuine bond rather than one based on convenience or superficiality.

Diogenes's approach to ethics was deeply rooted in his belief that moral behavior should be simple, honest, and aligned with nature rather than social conventions. He rejected the complex ethical codes of other philosophers, who he felt often hid behind words rather than practicing true virtue. To Diogenes, ethics wasn't a matter of high-minded ideals but of practical, everyday actions. He believed that one should live in harmony with nature, adopting a lifestyle as close to instinct and necessity as possible. This perspective often placed him at odds with society, as he defied established norms and openly criticized those he deemed hypocritical or morally complacent.

Diogenes's ethical philosophy emphasized self-discipline and self-reliance, which he viewed as essential to achieving inner freedom. He maintained that true happiness came from mastering one's desires and becoming independent of society's judgments and expectations. By liberating oneself from the need for approval or the trappings of wealth, one could achieve a kind of freedom inaccessible to those enslaved by their own desires or by the opinions of others. This freedom, he argued, was worth more than any material possession, as it brought peace of mind and resilience in the face of adversity.

One of Diogenes's central ethical beliefs was the value of "parrhesia," or fearless, honest speech. He thought that honesty was the foundation of any ethical life and that speaking truth to power or to anyone—even at personal risk—was essential. Diogenes's interactions with

figures of authority, such as Alexander the Great, reflected this principle. When Alexander visited him and offered to grant any wish, Diogenes famously replied, “Stand out of my light.” This response, both direct and audacious, illustrated his disdain for superficial power and his commitment to plain speaking. By rejecting the emperor’s offer, Diogenes demonstrated that he valued his personal freedom and integrity over any favor or material gain.

Diogenes also held a unique perspective on social status and hierarchy, challenging the notion that birth or wealth should dictate one’s position or worth. He believed that a person’s true value was defined by their character and actions, not by external markers like wealth, status, or social connections. To him, the concept of nobility was hollow; real nobility came from virtue and moral strength. Diogenes often humiliated those who prided themselves on their social standing, reminding them that true worth was found in self-discipline and simplicity. This disregard for social rank made him a kind of equalizer, one who refused to let external distinctions cloud his judgment of a person’s moral worth.

His view of family and relationships was equally radical. He saw attachment to family or friends as a potential distraction from one’s pursuit of virtue. Diogenes believed that close bonds could compromise a person’s independence, tying them to others’ expectations and limiting their freedom. He advocated for detachment, not out of coldness but from a belief that true strength and self-sufficiency required one to rely only on oneself. This perspective did not imply a lack of compassion but rather a focus on personal integrity over social obligations.

In his relationship with other philosophers, Diogenes was often openly confrontational. He particularly criticized Plato, whose abstract theories and idealism he found impractical and overly complex. Diogenes famously disrupted Plato’s lectures, once entering Plato’s academy and walking across his carpets while declaring, “I am trampling on Plato’s vanity.” Plato, in response, allegedly described Diogenes as “Socrates gone mad,” highlighting the difference between Diogenes’s radical Cynicism and Socratic philosophy. Despite this reputation, Diogenes’s direct and practical approach to philosophy won him a following among those disillusioned with the more speculative and theoretical aspects of Greek philosophy.

Yet Diogenes did hold Socrates in high regard, admiring his commitment to a simple and honest life. He saw Socrates as a kindred spirit, one who practiced what he preached and lived in a way that mirrored Diogenes’s own ideals of self-discipline and disregard for luxury. Diogenes’s style of philosophy, however, was far more provocative and uncompromising, using wit and sometimes shocking behavior to drive home his teachings. He saw his life as a form of living philosophy, one that required no books or lectures but only the courage to challenge oneself and others to live authentically.

Diogenes’s legacy as a philosopher and social critic remains influential. His emphasis on living according to nature, his disdain for societal pretensions, and his commitment to self-discipline continue to resonate, particularly within Stoic philosophy, which emerged later in part from his teachings. The Stoics admired Diogenes’s resilience and his ability to remain unmoved by fortune, embracing his ideas about personal freedom and inner strength. His philosophy also influenced the later development of asceticism, where a life of simplicity and detachment was seen as a path to enlightenment.

In the centuries following his death, Diogenes became an iconic figure, symbolizing the courage to live honestly and reject societal norms. His philosophy of Cynicism, though sometimes misunderstood as mere contempt or nihilism, was a call to authenticity and personal integrity. Diogenes urged people to strip away illusions, whether they were of social status, wealth, or empty beliefs, and to confront life directly, as it was. By doing so, he believed they could attain true wisdom and peace. His life remains a powerful example of a person who, in his quest for truth and self-mastery, was willing to defy the entire world if necessary.

Diogenes's final years and death reflect the spirit with which he lived his entire life. He approached old age and mortality without fear or regret, holding firm to his belief that death was merely a part of nature, and as such, it deserved neither dread nor reverence. Diogenes dismissed the conventions surrounding death and burial, reportedly instructing his followers to throw his body to the wild animals after he died. When questioned if he was worried about his body being desecrated by animals, he famously replied that he wouldn't be conscious of it and therefore it wouldn't matter. This irreverent stance toward death symbolized his broader philosophy: to be unafraid, self-sufficient, and indifferent to external forces that lay beyond personal control.

Diogenes's teachings about death underscored his belief in the insignificance of the physical self. He valued the mind and spirit far above the body, which he saw as temporary and ultimately unimportant. His views on burial were shocking to the Greek society of his time, where elaborate funeral rites were performed to honor the deceased and ensure their peaceful journey to the afterlife. By rejecting these customs, Diogenes called into question the entire Greek notion of honor and legacy, urging people instead to focus on cultivating wisdom and virtue rather than pursuing fleeting forms of glory.

As Diogenes approached the end of his life, he continued to hold onto the self-discipline that had defined his years. Several accounts describe his refusal to allow old age to slow him down, comparing his life to a race where he would push himself even harder as he neared the finish line. His final acts were marked by the same resilience and humor that had characterized him in his youth. Some stories even suggest he ended his life intentionally, either by refusing to breathe or, in another account, by choking on raw octopus, embracing his final moments with the kind of irony and boldness that had always defined him.

Diogenes's death left a significant legacy. His followers and admirers commemorated him as a philosophical hero, setting up statues and inscriptions in his honor. His tomb was said to have been marked by a pillar crowned with a marble dog, a fitting tribute to the man who embraced the nickname "Dog" and transformed it into a symbol of his fierce independence and loyalty to his ideals. The citizens of Corinth even commissioned a bronze statue in his honor, inscribed with verses extolling his wisdom and the "self-sufficiency" he taught to others.

In the centuries following his death, Diogenes's influence only grew. His life and philosophy became foundational to the Cynic movement, which advocated for a return to simplicity, honesty, and self-reliance. This movement later inspired the Stoics, who adopted many of Diogenes's teachings on self-discipline and inner freedom. The Stoic philosopher Epictetus, in particular, often referenced Diogenes as a model of fortitude and moral clarity, holding him up as an example of the ideal sage who lives in accordance with nature and remains unmoved by external circumstances.

Even beyond philosophy, Diogenes's impact can be seen in the world's broader cultural consciousness. His disdain for material wealth and social pretensions has resonated through the ages, influencing religious ascetics, artists, and political revolutionaries alike. Diogenes's commitment to living honestly and his rejection of empty conventions have made him an enduring figure, celebrated by those who question societal norms and seek a deeper, more meaningful way of life. His life, as challenging and confrontational as it was, continues to remind us of the power of living authentically and the freedom that comes from rejecting superficial values.

Diogenes's philosophy remains relevant today as a critique of modern consumerism, status, and the often superficial nature of social interactions. In a world that increasingly values wealth, fame, and comfort, Diogenes's call to focus on what truly matters—wisdom, character, and self-sufficiency—offers an alternative vision. His life and teachings challenge us to reconsider our priorities and to ask ourselves if we are living in alignment with our true values or if we are enslaved by desires for possessions, status, or approval.

Diogenes's legacy, therefore, is not merely a historical curiosity but an invitation to live more fully and freely, unshackled by the constraints of society's expectations. His message is as radical today as it was in ancient Greece, inspiring those who seek a life that is true to themselves, that embraces simplicity, and that strives for wisdom over wealth. Diogenes may have lived as a self-proclaimed "dog," but his philosophy, grounded in truth and virtue, endures as an example of the strength, resilience, and independence that come from living a life that answers only to itself.

With his wit, audacity, and profound commitment to honesty, Diogenes challenged the world to live with integrity and to embrace a simplicity that would strip away all that was false or trivial. His philosophy is a testament to the power of one person to challenge convention and to show others that freedom comes not from wealth or fame but from mastering oneself. To live like Diogenes is to live with courage, to question everything, and to pursue truth at all costs—a legacy that has made him, despite his unconventional ways, one of history's most inspiring thinkers.

Teachings of Diogenes

When someone informed him, "The Sinopeans have sentenced you to exile," he replied, "Yes, and I've sentenced them to stay where they are."
(Diogenes Laertius 6.49; G11)

To someone who told him, "The Sinopeans have banished you from the Black Sea," Diogenes the Dog retorted, "And I have sentenced them to remain there, beside the steep cliffs of that harsh sea."
(Plutarch, On Exile 7, 602a; G11)

When someone criticized him for being exiled, he responded, "But that is precisely why, you fool, I took up philosophy."
(Diogenes Laertius 6.49; G13)

Once, when he was rebuked for having counterfeited currency, he said, "That was back when I was as you are now; but as for what I am now, you'll never become." To another person who raised the same accusation, he replied, "Yes, there was a time I'd wet the bed, but not anymore."
(Diogenes Laertius 6.56; G4)

When he arrived in Athens, he encountered Antisthenes. Although Antisthenes initially refused to take on any students, Diogenes won him over through sheer determination. Once, when Antisthenes lifted his stick against him, Diogenes offered his head, saying, "Go ahead, strike me; you won't find a stick hard enough to keep me away until you have something to teach me." From that point on, he became his student, choosing to live a simple life as an exile.
(Diogenes Laertius 6.21; G19)

After repeatedly urging people to study philosophy with no response, Antisthenes grew frustrated and started rejecting everyone. Diogenes, however, held his ground. When Antisthenes raised his stick to threaten him, Diogenes stood even more firmly, insisting, "Strike me if you want; I'll offer you my head, but you'll never find a stick strong enough to make me leave your teachings." Moved, Antisthenes accepted him kindly.
(Aelian, Historical Miscellany 10.16; G19)

Antisthenes, who had grown unwilling to take on students, could not shake the determined Diogenes. When he threatened to beat him if he didn't leave, Diogenes reportedly bowed his head and said, "There is no stick hard enough to stop me from following you."
(Jerome, Against Jovinian 2.14; G19)

Diogenes often praised his mentor Antisthenes in a mocking way, saying, "This man turned me from a wealthy person into a beggar, making me live in a jar instead of a grand home." This conveyed his respect better than if he had simply said, "I am grateful to him for turning me into a philosopher and a man of great virtue."
(Macrobius, Saturnalia 7.3.21; G21)

When Diogenes asked Antisthenes for a tunic, he was told to fold his cloak over itself to double it.
(Diogenes Laertius 6.6; G23)

As Theophrastos recounts in his *Megaric*, Diogenes once observed a mouse running about without looking for a place to sleep, showing no fear of darkness, and feeling no desire for the usual comforts. From this, Diogenes found a solution to his own troubles.
(Diogenes Laertius 6.22; G172)

Diogenes was isolated, without any company or hospitality, as his poverty and disapproving attitude toward others drove them away. He was left eating simple barley bread and leaves, which was all he had. While eating, a mouse appeared and nibbled on crumbs that fell from his hand. Watching the mouse, Diogenes felt his mood lift, thinking, "This mouse has no need for the luxuries of Athens, and yet I am upset because I'm not dining with the Athenians." This moment brought him contentment just when he needed it most.
(Aelian, Historical Miscellany 13.26; G172)

A similar story is told about Diogenes when he first took up philosophy. During a festival, Athenians were feasting and celebrating all night. Diogenes, however, lay down to sleep in a corner of the marketplace, feeling pangs of doubt about his chosen life. Alone, he was living an arduous existence, deprived of common comforts. But then a mouse scurried up and ate crumbs from his barley cake, and this sight revived his spirits. He scolded himself, thinking, "How can it be, Diogenes, that this little mouse feasts on what you discard, yet you, a so-called noble creature, feel miserable because you're not over there, feasting on fine food and resting on plush cushions?"
(Plutarch, On Progress in Virtue 5, 77ef; G172)

Antisthenes' most famous follower, Diogenes, was greater than King Alexander in his mastery over nature. According to Satyros, who wrote biographies of great men, Diogenes would fold his cloak to shield himself from the cold and kept a knapsack to hold food. In his later years, he used a stick for support due to his body's frailty. He lived hand-to-mouth, begging for his needs, and made his home in archways and public porches. When he squeezed into his jar, he would joke that he had a "rolling house" that he could turn to face south in winter and north in summer, adapting his "home" to the changing seasons.
(Jerome, Against Jovinian 2.14; G175)

Some say he was the first to double his cloak because he also slept in it and kept a knapsack for food, using any place to eat, sleep, or speak. He would point to public buildings, like the Portico of Zeus, saying the Athenians had given him fine housing. Only later in life, when he grew weaker, did he begin using a stick. He once asked someone to find him a small house but, when they delayed, he settled into a storage jar at the Metroon. In summer, he would roll in the sand; in winter, he embraced snow-covered statues, training himself to endure discomfort.
(Diogenes Laertius 6.22–3, 6.34; G174, 176)

For a time, he used a wooden cup to drink, but when he saw a boy drinking water from his hand, he broke his cup, exclaiming, "I hadn't realized nature had already provided me a cup."
(Jerome, Against Jovinian 2.14; G175)

Seeing a young man drink from his cupped hand, Diogenes threw away his cup, saying that nature had equipped him with hands that were better suited for the purpose.
(Gnomologium Vaticanum 185; G158)

Diogenes reportedly carried a wooden cup in his knapsack to scoop water. But one day, after watching someone drink directly from their hands, he tossed his cup into the stream, declaring he no longer needed it since his hands could serve just as well.
(Simplicius, Commentary on the 'Encheiridion' of Epictetus 32; G160)

When advised to search for his runaway slave, he replied, "How strange if Manes can live without Diogenes, but Diogenes can't live without Manes!"
(Diogenes Laertius 6.55; G441)

When his slave ran away, Diogenes was indifferent, remarking that it would be strange if he couldn't live without the slave when the slave could live without him.
(Stobaeus 4.19.47; G441)

Diogenes once had a servant, Manes, who eventually found life with him unbearable and ran away. When people urged Diogenes to search for him, he replied, "Wouldn't it be absurd if Manes can do without Diogenes, but Diogenes can't do without Manes?" Manes later wandered to Delphi, where he met his fate, being attacked by dogs, a punishment fitting for the servant of Diogenes.
(Aelian, Historical Miscellany 13.28; G441)

When asked where he came from, he replied, "I'm a citizen of the world."
(Diogenes Laertius 6.63; G355)

He used to say that he had endured every curse found in tragic tales, for he was certainly: "Without a city or home, deprived of his homeland, A beggar, a wanderer, living day by day."
(Diogenes Laertius 6.38; G263)

Diogenes claimed he had suffered all the hardships of a tragic figure, being a beggar and a wanderer living day to day, but added, "Despite this, I'm ready to compete in happiness with the King of Persia."
(Gnomologium Vaticanum 201; G263)

Diogenes of Sinope often told himself that he had borne all the woes of tragedy and remained strong, for he was: "A wanderer without a home, deprived of his homeland, A beggar in rags, living day by day."
Yet he took as much pride in this as Alexander did in conquering the world on his return from India.
(Aelian, Historical Miscellany 3.29; G263)

About Wealth and Values

When Aristippos asked what he had gained from philosophy, he answered, "To be wealthy without possessing an obol."
(Gnomologium Vaticanum 182; G361)

When asked who among men is truly rich, he replied, “The one who is self-sufficient.”
(Gnomologium Vaticanum 180; G241)

He reasoned as follows: “All things belong to the gods; the wise are friends of the gods; friends share everything in common; therefore, everything belongs to the wise.”
(Diogenes Laertius 6.37; G353)

Diogenes remarked that poverty naturally leads us to philosophy since, while philosophy persuades by reasoning, poverty compels us by necessity.
(Stobaeus 4.32.11; G223)

On observing someone cowering before poverty, Diogenes encouraged him to be brave, quoting Homer:
"Come now, friend, stand by my side and watch me in action."
(Codex Ambrosianus Graecus 409, no. 116; G225B)

At a customs post, when asked if he was carrying valuables, he said that he was. After failing to find anything, the customs officer accused him of mockery, but Diogenes revealed his chest and declared, “Here I carry a vessel filled with many good things, but you can’t see them because you’ve closed the eyes of your soul.”
(Codex Patmos 263, no. 60; G471C)

When a thief attempted to steal his money bag as he slept, Diogenes, waking, said, “Take it, you scoundrel, and let me sleep!”
(Gnomologium Lindenbrogium no. 1; G243)

He often declared that the gods had made an easy life possible for humans, but it remains hidden because people crave sweets, perfumes, and similar luxuries.
(Diogenes Laertius 6.44; G322)

24a He observed that valuable things sell cheaply, and the reverse is also true; a statue might sell for three thousand drachmas, while a day’s barley flour costs two coppers.
(Diogenes Laertius 6.35; G323)

24b When someone complained that Athens was expensive, Diogenes led him to a perfume-seller, asking the price of myrrh. “A mina,” replied the seller, and Diogenes exclaimed, “Indeed, the city is expensive!” Then he led him to a butcher and asked the price of fine meat: “Three drachmas,” answered the butcher. “The city is expensive!” he repeated. He continued to sellers of wool, lupins, figs, and myrtle-berries, where he found much cheaper prices, concluding, “The city is neither cheap nor expensive on its own; it’s costly if one lives extravagantly and affordable if one lives simply.”
(Teles pp. 12.5–13.13 Hense; G222)

Food and Eating

Diogenes would say that others live to eat, but he eats only to live.
(Stobaeus 3.6.41; G182)

He said people eat for pleasure, and for that same reason, they never want to stop.
(Stobaeus 3.6.40; G182)

At a drinking party, he poured away a large glass of wine he was given, and when criticized, he replied, "If I drank it, not only would the wine be wasted, but so would I!"
(Maximus 30.14; G192)

When mice wandered onto his table, he joked, "Look, even Diogenes has dependents to support!"
(Diogenes Laertius 6.40; G173)

Asked if the wise eat cakes, he replied, "They eat all kinds of cakes, just like everyone else."
(Diogenes Laertius 6.56; G189)

When mocked for eating cakes, Diogenes said, "Philosophers partake in everything, just not in the same way as others."
(Gnomologium Vaticanum 188; G189)

Once, as he was eagerly eating cakes at a dinner, someone questioned him about it, and he replied that he was simply enjoying a better kind of bread.
(Athenaeus 3, 113f; G190)

When he found a cake among his olives, he threw it away, saying, "Stand aside, stranger, and make way for kings!"
(Diogenes Laertius 6.55; G494)

Given some white bread, he tossed out his coarser bread, repeating, "Stand aside, stranger, and make way for kings."
(Stobaeus 3.17.15; G494)

Once, while eating in a temple where dark bread was served, he threw it out, saying that nothing impure should enter a sacred place.
(Diogenes Laertius 6.64; G349)

When asked his favorite wine, he replied, "Someone else's."
(Diogenes Laertius 6.54; G193)

When asked at what time one should dine, he replied, "If you're wealthy, whenever you wish; if you're poor, whenever you can."
(Diogenes Laertius 6.40; G183)

Cynic Openess

Diogenes made it his practice to do everything in public, even matters concerning Demeter and Aphrodite. He reasoned, "If eating in public isn't improper, neither is any other natural function; and since eating is not improper, doing it in the marketplace isn't either." He would sometimes masturbate openly, remarking, "If only one could also ease hunger by rubbing one's stomach!"
(Diogenes Laertius 6.69; G147)

One day, he was seen masturbating in the marketplace and said, “If only hunger could be relieved by rubbing one’s stomach!”
(Diogenes Laertius 6.46; G147)

When people criticized him for this, he responded, “If only by rubbing my stomach, I could satisfy hunger and ease my needs!”
(Athenaeus 4, 158f; G147)

Chrysippos praised Diogenes for openly rubbing his genitals, saying to those present, “If only I could rid my stomach of hunger in the same way!”
(Plutarch, On Stoic Self-Contradictions 21, 1044b; G147)

When reproached for eating in the marketplace, he responded, “Well, that’s where I became hungry.”
(Diogenes Laertius 6.58; G186)

Diogenes observed that even donkeys eat and drink wherever they happen to be.
(Simplicius, Commentary on Aristotle’s ‘On the Heavens’, p. 148, 19–20; G185)

When asked why he was eating in a public portico, he replied, “I see sailors and other workers bring their food to their place of work as well.”
(Gnomologium Vaticanum 196; G187)

When scolded for drinking in a tavern, he replied, “And when I need a haircut, I go to a barber’s.”
(Diogenes Laertius 6.66; G194)

A man once asked to study philosophy with him, so Diogenes handed him a fish to carry and told him to follow. The man, embarrassed, dropped the fish, and when Diogenes saw him later, he laughed, saying, “Our friendship ended over a fish!”
(Diogenes Laertius 6.36; G367)

Diocles offers another version of this story: a man said to Diogenes, “I am at your command.” Diogenes handed him a piece of cheese worth half an obol to carry; when the man refused, Diogenes exclaimed, “Our friendship ended over half an obol’s worth of cheese!”
(Diogenes Laertius 6.36; G367)

When someone dropped a piece of bread and was too embarrassed to pick it up, Diogenes demonstrated humility by dragging a wine jar with a string through the public square.
(Diogenes Laertius 6.35; G188)

Begging

When he needed money, he would tell his friends that he was claiming what was rightfully his, not begging for charity.
(Diogenes Laertius 6.46; G234)

When people praised someone for giving him money, he responded, “But you don’t praise me for being worthy of receiving it.”
(Diogenes Laertius 6.62; G248)

He once declined a dinner invitation, saying that the hosts had not shown proper gratitude the last time.
(Diogenes Laertius 6.34; G467)

When he begged (especially in his early days, due to poverty), he would say, “If you’ve given to others before, then give to me as well; if not, then make me the first.”
(Diogenes Laertius 6.49; G249)

One day, he begged from a statue, and when asked why, he replied, “I’m practicing getting used to refusals.”
(Diogenes Laertius 6.49; G247)

Asked why people give to beggars but not philosophers, he replied, “Because they think they may someday be lame or blind, but they never expect to become philosophers.”
(Diogenes Laertius 6.56; G366)

He said it was equally wrong to give to those who don’t deserve it and to fail to give to those who do.
(Maximus 8.27; G366)

When someone asked him to return his cloak, Diogenes replied, “If you gave it to me, it’s mine; if you lent it, I’m still using it.”
(Diogenes Laertius 6.62; G252)

He asked a spendthrift for a mina, and when questioned why he requested only an obol from others, he replied, “Because I expect to get more from them later, but whether I will receive anything else from you is up to the gods.”
(Diogenes Laertius 6.67; G253)

Once, while begging from a miser who was slow to give, he said, “I’m asking you for money to live on, not for my funeral expenses.”
(Diogenes Laertius 6.56; G251)

He once asked a surly man for money, and when the man said, “Persuade me,” Diogenes replied, “If I could do that, I’d persuade you to go hang yourself.”
(Diogenes Laertius 6.59; G250)

When Diotimos of Carystos gave him a coin, he said, “May the gods grant you your heart’s desire—a husband and a home,” as Diotimos was thought to be somewhat effeminate.
(Aelian, Historical Miscellany 4.27; G235)

Diogenes once lit a lamp in broad daylight and wandered about with it, saying, “I’m looking for an honest man.”
(Diogenes Laertius 6.41; G272)

One day, he lit a lamp during the day and walked around; when people asked him why, he replied that he was searching for a true man.
(Maximus 70.20; G272)

He defined "human beings" as those who possess true understanding of humanity, just as grammarians know grammar and musicians know music.
(Codex Patmos 263, no. 55; G331B)

Returning from the Olympic Games, someone asked if there was a large crowd. Diogenes answered, "There were many people, but hardly a man among them."
(Diogenes Laertius 6.60; G273)

When asked if there were many men in the baths, he replied, "No." When asked if there was a crowd, he said, "Certainly."
(Diogenes Laertius 6.40; G274)

Once he shouted, "Hey, men!" and when people gathered, he struck them, saying, "I called for men, not scoundrels!"
(Diogenes Laertius 6.32; G278)

When asked where in Greece he had seen good men, he replied, "Nowhere men, but boys in Sparta."
(Diogenes Laertius 6.27; G280)

Asked where he was coming from and going to, he answered, "From the men's quarters to the women's."
(Diogenes Laertius 6.59; G282)

When an Athenian criticized him for admiring Spartans without living among them, he replied, "A doctor works where people are ill, not among those who are healthy."
(Stobaeus 3.13.43; G281)

Victory

After a race in armor at the Olympics, Diogenes declared himself victor over all in human excellence.
(Demetrius, On Style 260; G449)

Diogenes said he had seen many compete in wrestling and running, but none in striving for human excellence.
(Stobaeus 3.4.111; G450)

He remarked that men compete in digging and kicking, but none seek excellence in humanity.
(Diogenes Laertius 6.27; G450)

He thought it ridiculous that athletes and singers discipline themselves to master their bodies and voices, yet few discipline themselves for their soul's well-being.
(Stobaeus 3.5.39; G451)

Diogenes maintained that no exercise is worthwhile unless it aims at the soul's order and fitness, rather than that of the body.
(Stobaeus 3.7.17; G292)

When a herald at the Olympics proclaimed, "Dioxippos is victor over men!" Diogenes said, "No, he's victor over slaves. I am victor over men."
(Diogenes Laertius 6.43; G76)

When told someone was victor over men at the Pythian Games, Diogenes replied, "No, I am victor over men; he over slaves."
(Diogenes Laertius 6.33; G76)

As Olympic victor Dioxippos was welcomed into Athens with great fanfare, a beautiful woman came to see him. Captivated, Dioxippos kept glancing back at her, his gaze fixed and his color changing. Observing this, Diogenes remarked, "Look, your grand champion has been taken captive by a mere girl!"
(Aelian, Historical Miscellany 12.58; G452)

Diogenes saw Dioxippos in a chariot, unable to stop gazing at a woman watching the procession. "Look," he said, "the great athlete has been bested by a mere girl."
(Plutarch, On Curiosity 12, 521b; G452)

Seeing an Olympic champion constantly looking back at a woman, Diogenes said, "Look at this mighty ram, snared by the first girl he meets!"
(Diogenes Laertius 6.61; G452)

Diogenes would say he set his standards high, like chorus-masters, so that others might align themselves with them.
(Diogenes Laertius 6.35; G266)

Swimming against the stream

He once walked into a theater against the exiting crowd, and when asked why, replied, "This is how I try to live my whole life."
(Diogenes Laertius 6.64; G267)

He walked backward in the public arcade, and when people laughed, he remarked, "Aren't you ashamed? You walk backward in life, yet laugh at me for walking backward here."
(Stobaeus 3.4.83; G267)

Someone claimed Diogenes was out of his mind. "It's not that I'm out of my mind," he replied, "but that I don't share the same mind as you."
(Stobaeus 3.3.51; G427)

One day, after giving a serious talk with little attention from onlookers, he began whistling. When people gathered around, he scolded them for ignoring serious subjects yet eagerly flocking to nonsense.
(Diogenes Laertius 6.27; G314)

Diogenes often told himself, “When most people praise you, consider yourself unworthy; when all condemn you, consider yourself worthy.”
(Codex Vaticanus Graecus 633, fo. 119; G435)

Diogenes would mock noble birth and reputation, calling them mere flashy adornments for vice.
(Diogenes Laertius 6.72; G353)

When asked, “Who are the noblest people?” he answered, “Those who despise wealth, fame, pleasure, and attachment to life, thus conquering their opposites: poverty, disgrace, suffering, and death.”
(Stobaeus 4.29.19; G302)

When someone asked how one could best achieve a good reputation, he replied, “By holding reputation in disdain.”
(Lucian, Defence of the Portrait-Study 17; G302)

To another who asked how to gain fame quickly and easily, he said, “By being able to look down on reputation.”
(Nicephorus Gregoras, Byzantine History 21.5.7; G302)

When told, “Many people laugh at you,” he replied, “Yes, but I’m not laughed down.”
(Diogenes Laertius 6.54; G430)

A good person may be insulted, but the insult does not harm him if he holds it in contempt. When someone insulted Diogenes, another said, “Diogenes, that man insulted you,” and he replied, “But I am not harmed by it.”
(Olympiodoros, Commentary on Plato’s ‘Gorgias’, 476a, 22.2; G270)

When told, “Most people laugh at you,” he replied, “And surely donkeys laugh at them; but just as they ignore the donkeys, so do I ignore them.”
(Diogenes Laertius 6.58; G431)

Diogenes would approach women from brothels and criticize them. His purpose? To train himself to endure insults calmly in exchange for insults.
(Gregory Nazianzen, Carmina 1.2, 25.494–6; G271)

When someone told him, “You’re pretending to be a philosopher without truly being one,” he replied, “Then at least I’m better than you, for I genuinely wish to be one.”
(Gnomologium Vaticanum 174; G365)

To another who said, “You act the philosopher without knowing anything,” he replied, “Even if I’m only pretending, that alone shows my aspiration to wisdom.”
(Diogenes Laertius 6.64; G364)

Dog

Some philosophical schools were named after nicknames used mockingly, as was the case with the Cynics.
(Diogenes Laertius 1.17)

Diogenes used to say, “Other dogs bite their enemies, but I bite my friends to save them.”
(Stobaeus 3.13.44; G149)

When Polyxenos the dialectician objected to people calling Diogenes a dog, Diogenes said, “You should call me ‘Dog’ too. Diogenes is only my name; I am indeed a dog, but a noble breed that guards its friends.”
(Gnomologium Vaticanum 194; G149)

Asked why he was called a dog, he replied, “I fawn on those who give me something, bark at those who don’t, and bite scoundrels.”
(Diogenes Laertius 6.60; G143)

When asked what kind of dog he was, he said, “When I’m hungry, a Maltese; when I’m full, a Molossian. These dogs are praised by all but rarely taken hunting due to the hardships involved. Similarly, you’re unwilling to share my life because you fear the difficulties.”
(Diogenes Laertius 6.55; G143)

While eating in the marketplace, bystanders taunted him as a dog. “You’re the dogs,” he replied, “for crowding around me as I eat.”
(Diogenes Laertius 6.61; G147)

At a dinner, when people tossed him bones as if he were a dog, he responded by urinating on them as if he were a dog.
(Diogenes Laertius 6.46; G146)

To boys who joked, “Watch out that he doesn’t bite us,” he said, “Don’t worry, boys, dogs don’t eat beets.”
(Diogenes Laertius 6.45; G145)

When two cowards avoided him, he said, “Don’t worry, a dog doesn’t eat beets.”
(Diogenes Laertius 6.61; G145)

He would say he was the type of dog whom everyone praises, yet none who praise him dare join him on the hunt.
(Diogenes Laertius 6.33; G144)

The Folly of Empty Pursuits

Diogenes marveled that grammarians would explore the trials of Odysseus while remaining ignorant of their own; that musicians would tune their instruments while leaving their own souls out of harmony; that mathematicians would gaze at the stars but ignore what’s

underfoot; and that orators would passionately praise justice yet fail to practice it.
(Diogenes Laertius 6.27–8; G374)

He referred to the Dionysian festival plays as grand puppet shows for fools.
(Diogenes Laertius 6.24; G487)

Once, while a young man gave a recital, Diogenes stood nearby eating lupin seeds. As the crowd turned their attention to him, he acted surprised that people would abandon the speaker to watch him.
(Diogenes Laertius 6.48; G393)

Hearing that a young man who studied with various sophists wanted to join him, Diogenes said, "Do not come here, you turncoat, just to snivel at my feet."
(Gnomologium Vaticanum 193; G498)

When a geometer criticized him as uneducated, he replied, "Forgive me for not learning what Cheiron never taught Achilles."
(Stobaeus 3.31.118; G373)

To someone discussing astronomy, he said, "How many days did it take you to come down from the sky?"
(Diogenes Laertius 6.39; G371)

When asked about the workings of the heavens, he replied, "I've never been up there."
(Tertullian, To the Nations 2.2; G337)

An astronomer pointed to a star chart, identifying certain stars as "wanderers." Diogenes responded, "No, it's not these stars that wander, but those people over there," pointing to the onlookers.
(Stobaeus 2.1.23; G372)

Another time, an astronomer identified stars as "the wanderers," and Diogenes countered, "No, it's the people around you, staring as if you've just come down from the heavens, who are truly astray."
(Gnomologium Parisinum 7)

Cultivating Inner Virtue

Diogenes would say that nothing worthwhile is achieved without training; it can overcome anything. Instead of engaging in pointless efforts, one should choose natural pursuits to live happily. People are unhappy due to foolish choices, he claimed, as the very act of renouncing pleasure brings its own great pleasure—if one has practiced it. He argued that those accustomed to pleasure resist giving it up, while those who practice its opposite find greater satisfaction in rejecting pleasure than in pleasure itself.

Through this, Diogenes rejected conventional values, pursuing those aligned with nature, and likened his way of life to that of Heracles, prioritizing freedom above all.
(Diogenes Laertius 6.70–1)

Diogenes stated that true pleasure lies in a calm and cheerful soul; without it, the wealth of Midas or Croesus brings no benefit. Anyone who suffers over matters great or small cannot be happy but is instead wretched.
(Gnomologium Vaticanum 181; G300)

He believed happiness is to be genuinely content and undisturbed, whatever one's place or circumstances.
(Stobaeus 4.39.20; G301)

He defined true happiness as a state in which the mind and soul are always at peace and in good cheer.
(Stobaeus 4.39.21; G306)

Diogenes observed that people tend to blame everything but their own flaws, accusing old age, poverty, timing, or circumstances, instead of taking responsibility. He said he once heard Vice herself admitting, "I alone am to blame for all these ills."
(Teles, 8.4–9.2 Hense; G468)

To one who said life was bad, he replied, "Not life itself, but life lived badly."
(Diogenes Laertius 6.55; G310)

When someone declared themselves unfit for philosophy, Diogenes replied, "Then why live at all if you don't aim to live well?"
(Diogenes Laertius 6.65; G362)

Diogenes said people strive for what they need to survive but neglect what is necessary to live well.
(Stobaeus 3.4.85; G311)

He would often say that we either need reason to guide our lives—or a rope.
(Diogenes Laertius 6.24; G303)

When he saw his Spartan host preparing excitedly for a festival, he remarked, "Doesn't a good man see every day as a festival?"
(Plutarch, On Tranquillity of Mind 20, 477c; G464)

Asked what he gained from philosophy, he replied, "This, if nothing else: I am prepared for any fate."
(Diogenes Laertius 6.63; G360)

Diogenes imagined Fortune charging at him, saying, "But that mad dog alone I cannot strike!"
(Stobaeus 2.8.21; G148)

When faced with misfortune, he would say, "Thank you, Fortune, for dealing with me so directly!" and would walk away whistling.
(Stobaeus 4.44.71; G351)

When unexpected challenges arose, he would say, “Thank you, Fortune, for training me in virtue through adversity.”
(Codex Patmos 263, no. 58; G331E)

Hollow Rhetoric

To a supposed philosopher engaged in empty arguments, he said, “You wretch, you dishonor the best part of a philosopher’s life with your quibbling, yet you dare to call yourself a philosopher.”
(Stobaeus 3.33.14; G363)

When someone used a logical argument to prove he had horns, Diogenes touched his forehead and said, “Well, I don’t see any.” Similarly, when someone claimed there was no such thing as motion, he simply stood up and walked around.
(Diogenes Laertius 6.38–9; G479)

A dialectician from Plato’s school tried to trick him by asking, “You aren’t what I am, right?” Diogenes agreed. The man continued, “I am human, so you are not.” Diogenes replied, “That’s false, but if you want it to be true, go ahead and start with me.”
(Aulus Gellius, Attic Nights 18, 13.7–8; G480)

Plato

Diogenes called Plato’s philosophy a waste of time.
(Diogenes Laertius 6.24; G487)

When Plato defined man as a “two-footed animal without wings,” Diogenes plucked a chicken and brought it to Plato’s lecture, saying, “Here’s Plato’s man!” The definition was then amended to include “with broad nails.”
(Diogenes Laertius 6.40; G63)

When Plato discussed abstract “tableness” and “cupness,” Diogenes remarked, “I see a table and a cup, but no ‘tableness’ or ‘cupness.’” Plato replied, “That’s because you have eyes to see the physical, but lack the intellect for the abstract.”
(Diogenes Laertius 6.53; G62)

Upon hearing Plato praised, Diogenes remarked, “What’s so impressive about a man who has studied philosophy so long yet never caused anyone any discomfort?”
(Plutarch, On Moral Virtue 12, 452d; G61)

Diogenes asked Plato if he was writing laws, and Plato confirmed it. “Strange,” said Diogenes, “didn’t you already write a *Republic*? Doesn’t it already have laws?”
(Stobaeus 3.13.45; G64)

Diogenes once asked Plato for three figs, but Plato sent him an entire bushel. Diogenes responded, “The usual with you—ask for one thing and you deliver a thousand.”
(Stobaeus 3.36.21; G55)

Diogenes asked Plato for wine and some dried figs, and Plato sent a whole jar of each. Diogenes remarked, “If someone asked you what two and two made, would you answer ‘twenty’? You never give what’s asked or answer what’s questioned.”
(Diogenes Laertius 6.26; G55)

Seeing Diogenes washing vegetables, Plato remarked, “If you’d court Dionysios, you wouldn’t need to wash vegetables.” Diogenes replied, “And if you’d wash vegetables, you wouldn’t need to court Dionysios.”
(Diogenes Laertius 6.58; G56)

Noticing Plato only eating olives at a feast, Diogenes said, “Didn’t you go all the way to Sicily for dishes like these? Why don’t you enjoy them now?” Plato replied that even in Sicily, he mostly ate olives. Diogenes retorted, “Then why travel to Syracuse? Were there no olives in Attica?”
(Diogenes Laertius 6.25; G55)

While eating figs, Diogenes offered some to Plato, who ate them all. Diogenes then said, “I offered you a share, not the entire lot.”
(Diogenes Laertius 6.25; G55)

Diogenes once offered Aristotle some figs. Knowing Diogenes likely had a witty remark ready if he declined, Aristotle took the figs, saying, “You’ve lost your witticism along with your figs.” Later, he accepted figs again, held them up like a prize, and returned them, saying, “Great is Diogenes.”
(Diogenes Laertius 5.18; G68)

When criticized for begging while Plato did not, he replied, “Oh, he begs too, only he whispers so others won’t hear.”
(Diogenes Laertius 6.67; G58)

During a discussion, Plato grew irritated at Diogenes for not listening and called him “dog.” Diogenes calmly replied, “I’ve never returned to the place where I was sold, as dogs do,” referencing Plato’s return to Sicily.
(Aelian, Historical Miscellany 14.33; G59)

When Plato called him a dog, Diogenes replied, “Yes, because I return only to those who sold me.”
(Diogenes Laertius 6.40; G59)

Once, Diogenes stomped on Plato’s carpets, saying, “I’m trampling on Plato’s vanity.” Plato replied, “How vain you are, Diogenes, in showing you’re not vain!”
(Diogenes Laertius 6.26; G55)

Others say Diogenes claimed, “I trample on Plato’s vanity,” to which Plato responded, “Yes, with another kind of vanity.”
(Diogenes Laertius 6.26; G55)

When Diogenes invited Plato to dine in the marketplace, Plato remarked, “Your simplicity would be charming if it weren’t so affected.”
(Gnomologium Vaticanum 445; G60)

Standing outside in the rain, Diogenes soaked himself. As bystanders pitied him, Plato, also present, said, "If you really want to pity him, just walk away."
(Diogenes Laertius 6.41; G57)

Plato allegedly described Diogenes as "Socrates gone mad."
(Aelian, Historical Miscellany 14.33; G59)

When asked what kind of person Diogenes was, Plato answered, "Socrates gone mad."
(Diogenes Laertius 6.54; G59)

Diogenes used to say that Socrates himself led a life of luxury, showing too much concern for his small house, his bed, and his sandals (which Socrates did wear occasionally).
(Aelian, Historical Miscellany 4.11; G256)

He remarked that Eucleides' school was nothing but bitterness.
(Diogenes Laertius 6.24; G487)

Chains of Wealth

Diogenes said that illusion, like a shepherd, leads most people wherever it wants.
(Stobaeus 3.22.41; G289)

He called avarice the mother-city of all evils.
(Diogenes Laertius 6.50; G228)

He likened wealth to fortune's vomit.
(Arsenius p. 209, 11; G220)

Those who amass great wealth he referred to as arch-beggars.
(Stobaeus 3.10.62; G240)

He would say that neither in a rich city nor a wealthy household can virtue reside.
(Stobaeus 4.31.88; G221)

He condemned people who praise honest folks for rising above greed, yet envy the extremely wealthy.
(Diogenes Laertius 6.28; G237)

Asked if a particular man was wealthy, Diogenes replied, "I wouldn't know; I don't know how he uses his wealth."
(Codex Patmos 263, no. 54; G246B)

When an uneducated man proudly showed off his fine house, Diogenes commented, "Very nice, much like Egyptian temples: beautifully furnished but with cats or monkeys inside."
(Codex Ambrosianus Graecus 409, no. 117; G236B)

Invited into a luxurious home where he was told not to spit, Diogenes cleared his throat and spat on the host's face, saying he couldn't find a worse place to spit.
(Diogenes Laertius 6.32; G236)

In a wealthy home where the owner neglected himself but lavished care on his possessions, Diogenes cleared his throat and spat on the man himself. When questioned, he replied, "I couldn't find anything here as neglected as its owner," noting the adorned walls, mosaic floors, and polished furniture, with the master being the only thing left unkempt.
(Galen, Protreptic 8; G236)

Diogenes compared the greedy to people with dropsy, saying just as those swollen with water still thirst, so do the avaricious crave more, worsening their condition as they feed it.
(Stobaeus 3.10.45; G229)

To someone buying large amounts of land, he said, "If not for your love of money, there'd be no place left to satisfy your endless greed."
(Codex Patmos 263, no. 67; G246D)

Seeing a miser carried out for burial, he commented, "After living a lifeless life, he's left a living to others."
(Codex Palatinus Graecus 297, no. 71, fo. 118r; G231)

When a person of poor character criticized his poverty, Diogenes replied, "I've never seen anyone tortured because of poverty, but plenty due to wickedness."
(Stobaeus 4.32.12; G224)

To someone who reproached him for his poverty, he answered, "I've never known anyone to become a tyrant due to poverty—but plenty due to riches."
(Stobaeus 4.33.26; G225)

The Chains of Appetite

He said that just as servants obey their masters, so bad people are slaves to their desires.
(Diogenes Laertius 6.66; G318)

He called those enslaved by their appetites for food, sex, and sleep "triple-slaves."
(Gnomologium Vaticanum 195; G180)

He found it odd that servants wouldn't steal food when they saw their masters eating like gluttons.
(Diogenes Laertius 6.28; G444)

To a man who had his servant put on his shoes, he said, "You won't be fully happy until he wipes your nose too—and that'll happen when you lose the use of your hands."
(Diogenes Laertius 6.44; G322)

He likened the stomach to a whirlpool, constantly consuming one's livelihood.
(Diogenes Laertius 6.51; G181)

He noted that houses stocked with food attract mice and weasels, just as bodies that take in too much attract disease.
(Stobaeus 3.6.37; G195)

Diogenes mocked those who lock away their treasures with bolts but leave their bodies wide open through their mouths, eyes, and ears.
(Stobaeus 3.6.17; G317)

He said tyrants don't arise from those who eat barley but from those who indulge in fine fare.
(Julian, Oration 9, 199a; G196)

He compared those who live indulgently to fig trees on cliffs, whose fruit is eaten only by crows and vultures.
(Diogenes Laertius 6.60; G321)

Similarly, he likened wealthy wastrels to inaccessible fruit trees whose bounty is squandered on parasites and indulgences instead of useful purposes.
(Stobaeus 4.31.48; G242)

Seeing a "for sale" sign on a lavish home, he said, "I knew you'd end up vomiting up your owner after such a feast."
(Diogenes Laertius 6.47; G233)

Seeing a young man who had squandered his inheritance living on bread and water, he said, "If you'd chosen this out of reason, you wouldn't be forced to do it now."
(Gnomologium Vaticanum 169; G191)

To a spendthrift eating olives at a tavern, he remarked, "If you'd had this for breakfast, you wouldn't be dining this way out of necessity."
(Diogenes Laertius 6.50; G191)

Love

Diogenes called love "the occupation of the idle."
(Diogenes Laertius 6.51; G198)

He said that lovers find pleasure in their misfortune.
(Diogenes Laertius 6.67; G199)

He gave blunt advice, saying, "Go to a brothel, young man, and see that what is worthless differs little from what is highly prized."
(Plutarch, On the Education of Children 7, 5c; G398)

He compared attractive courtesans to a lethal honeyed mixture.
(Diogenes Laertius 6.61; G209)

To a man desperately pursuing a courtesan, he said, "Why are you so eager for something better lost than gained?"
(Diogenes Laertius 6.66; G210)

On a golden statue that Phryne dedicated at Delphi, Diogenes inscribed: "A gift from the licentiousness of the Greeks."
(Diogenes Laertius 6.60; G212)

Diogenes on Sexuality and Self-Control

Asked about the right time to marry, he responded, “For the young, not yet; for the older, never.”
(Diogenes Laertius 6.54; G200)

He thought there was nothing cheaper than an adulterer, who risks his life for something worth a mere drachma.
(Stobaeus 3.6.39; G218)

When a man was condemned for adultery, Diogenes advised, “Don’t risk your life for something that can be had as a gift.”
(John Cassian, Conferences 13.5; G219)

Body

Seeing a young man acting effeminately, Diogenes scolded him, saying, “Are you ashamed to betray yourself worse than nature did? Nature made you a man, yet you’re turning yourself into a woman.”
(Diogenes Laertius 6.65; G403)

When a young man dressed effeminately asked him something, Diogenes refused to answer until he proved his gender.
(Diogenes Laertius 6.46; G403)

To a youth complaining about unwelcome advances, he said, “Then stop advertising your unnatural desires.”
(Diogenes Laertius 6.47; G409)

Observing a young man studying philosophy, he remarked, “It’s good you’ve turned admirers of your body toward your soul.”
(Diogenes Laertius 6.58; G397)

Seeing a handsome young man with admirers, he said, “Strive to turn those who love your beauty to love the beauty of your soul.”
(Gnomologium Vaticanum 176; G397)

To a youth playing kottabos in the baths, he said, “The better you are at this, the worse you are.”
(Diogenes Laertius 6.46; G401)

Noticing a young man preparing to dine with officials, he took him to his family, advising them to keep a close watch.
(Diogenes Laertius 6.46; G402)

To one who took pride in his looks, Diogenes said, “Are you ashamed to treasure your fleeting beauty, borrowed for a short time?”
(Gnomologium Parisinum 229)

Seeing a young man perfumed, he remarked, “Watch that your fine scent doesn’t foul up your life.”
(Diogenes Laertius 6.66; G325)

To another young man wearing perfume, he said, “Your pleasant scent is making a mess of your life.”
(Codex Parisinus Graecus 1168, no. 14; G407B)

Observing a youth who was beautifying himself, he said, “If that’s for men, you’re pathetic; if for women, you’re a scoundrel.”
(Diogenes Laertius 6.54; G405)

Diogenes believed that having excessively short hair and wearing fine clothes is the mark of either a fool or a rogue.
(Basil, De Legendis Libris Gentilium 7; G165)

Seeing a young man proud of his expensive cloak, he said, “Stop boasting about qualities borrowed from a sheep.”
(Gnomologium Vaticanum 177; G407)

Miscellaneous sayings

As Metrocles recounts, Diogenes once crashed a party with his head half-shaven and was beaten by the guests. He later wrote their names on a tablet, wearing it around his neck until they were shamed and condemned by all.
(Diogenes Laertius 6.33; G412)

He called the wine shops the dining halls of Attica.
(Aristotle, Rhetoric 3.10, 1411a 24–5; G184)

After giving a speech on self-control, he told the applauding Athenians, “To hell with you all; you contradict everything I say in your actions.”
(Stobaeus 2.15.43; G283)

At the Olympic festival, Diogenes saw Rhodian youths in lavish attire and laughed, saying, “Sheer vanity!” When he saw Spartans in ragged clothes, he commented, “Just another kind of vanity!”
(Aelian, Historical Miscellany 9.34; G288)

He once applied perfume to his feet, saying, “Perfume from the head drifts away, but from the feet, it rises to one’s nostrils.”
(Diogenes Laertius 6.39; G324)

Dining with King Antigonos, he rubbed scented water onto his knees. When the king asked why, Diogenes replied, “Because I lift my knees to my nose when I lie down.”
(Gnomologium Parisinum 8)

Religion

Diogenes criticized people’s prayers, noting that they ask for what seems good to them, rather than what truly is.
(Diogenes Laertius 6.42; G350)

It annoyed him that people would sacrifice to the gods for good health but harm their health by feasting at those very sacrifices.
(Diogenes Laertius 6.28; G345)

Diogenes remarked, “People pray for health, yet most act in ways that damage it.”
(Stobaeus 3.6.35; G345)

To a couple sacrificing for a son, he said, “But do you sacrifice to ensure what kind of person he will be?”
(Diogenes Laertius 6.63; G343)

Seeing someone undergoing a purification rite, he commented, “Poor soul, don’t you realize that just as water can’t cleanse grammar errors, it won’t cleanse errors in life either?”
(Diogenes Laertius 6.42; G326)

When urged by the Athenians to be initiated, with the claim that initiates enjoy a better position in Hades, he replied, “Absurd if Agesilaos and Epaminondas should be left in the mud while worthless people find joy in the Isles of the Blessed just because they were initiated.”
(Diogenes Laertius 6.39; G339)

Upon hearing lines from Sophocles about the Mysteries, praising the blessed state of initiates in Hades, he asked, “So, are you saying Patakion the thief fares better than Epaminondas just because he was initiated?”
(Plutarch, How a Young Man Should Listen to Poets 4.21 ef; G339)

When someone marveled at the many votive offerings on Samothrace, Diogenes said, “There would be many more if those who were not saved offered them as well.”
(Diogenes Laertius 6.59; G342)

Seeing a woman in a compromising posture while praying, he approached and said, “Are you not worried that the god might be behind you? After all, he is everywhere, and that posture is hardly fitting.”
(Diogenes Laertius 6.37; G344)

He dedicated a pugilist to Asklepios—a man who would beat anyone who bowed before him.
(Diogenes Laertius 6.38; G341)

Gathering figs, he was warned that someone had recently hanged himself from that tree. "Then I'll clear it," he replied.
(Diogenes Laertius 6.61; G348)

Entering a temple at dusk, he seized a wooden statue of Heracles, saying mockingly, "Heracles, it's time for your thirteenth labor—help me cook my lentils," and tossed it into the fire.
(Oracles of the Greek Gods, no. 70, ed. K. Buresch; G131)

One day, watching temple guards arrest a man who had stolen a bowl, he said, "The big thieves are arresting the little thief."
(Diogenes Laertius 6.45; G462)

About Superstition

He said that when he saw pilots, doctors, and philosophers, he thought man was the wisest creature. But when he saw diviners and those who consulted them, he thought there was nothing more foolish.
(Diogenes Laertius 6.24; G375)

To those disturbed by their dreams, he would say, "You pay little attention to your waking actions, yet obsess over what you imagine in your sleep."
(Diogenes Laertius 6.43; G327)

A superstitious man threatened to strike Diogenes, who replied, "And I could make you tremble simply by sneezing from the left."
(Diogenes Laertius 6.48; G346)

When someone marveled at finding a snake wrapped around a bolt, he replied, "There's nothing odd about that; it would be stranger if you saw a pestle wrapped around the snake."
(Clement of Alexandria, Stromata 7.4.25.1; G463)

When Agesilaos of Cos recounted a dream, Diogenes remarked, "You reflect on your words and actions in dreams but ignore where you stumble while awake."
(Codex Patmos 263, no. 59; G471B)

About Gods

Diogenes remarked that Harpalos, a successful pirate, was proof against the existence of the gods, having lived long and prospered.
(Cicero, On the Nature of the Gods 3.83; G335)

He argued that the prosperity of the wicked casts doubt on the power of the gods.
(Cicero, On the Nature of the Gods 3.88; G335)

Asked if the gods exist, he said, “I don’t know, but I believe it’s best that they do.”
(Tertullian, To the Nations 2.2; G337)

When someone asked, “Are you Diogenes, who doesn’t believe in the gods?” he replied, “How could I be, when I think you are detestable to them?”
(Epictetus 3.22.90–1; G334)

When Lysias the pharmacist asked if he believed in the gods, he replied, “How could I not, when I regard you as hateful to them?”
(Diogenes Laertius 6.42; G334)

Diogenes and the Orators

Diogenes called orators “the lackeys of the crowd” and referred to honorary crowns as mere adornments of fame.
(Diogenes Laertius 6.41; G501)

He described orators and others who speak for fame as “thrice-human.”
(Diogenes Laertius 6.47; G501)

He compared words spoken solely to please to cloying honey that chokes.
(Diogenes Laertius 6.51; G505)

When asked what is the finest thing in life, he replied, “Plain speaking.”
(Diogenes Laertius 6.69; G473)

He viewed reproof as a benefit for others.
(Stobaeus 3.13.42; G307)

Diogenes remarked that orators are fervent about justice in speeches but ignore it in actions.
(Diogenes Laertius 6.28; G504)

When someone wanted to see Demosthenes, Diogenes pointed him out with his middle finger, saying, “There’s the demagogue of Athens!”
(Diogenes Laertius 6.34; G502)

Diogenes once gestured toward a sophist with his middle finger. When the man grew angry, he said, “That’s the person you asked about—I’ve pointed him out for you!”
(Epictetus 3.2.11; G276)

While dining in a tavern, Diogenes called out to Demosthenes, who ignored him. Diogenes then said, “Are you ashamed, Demosthenes, to enter a tavern? Your master comes here daily!”
(Aelian, Historical Miscellany 9.19; G503)

When he caught Demosthenes eating in a tavern, and Demosthenes tried to hide, Diogenes quipped, “The more you hide, the deeper in you’ll go!”
(Diogenes Laertius 6.34; G502)

He mocked Demosthenes as a fierce Scythian in speech but a pampered citizen in battle.
(Plutarch, Lives of the Ten Orators 847F)

When Anaximenes was giving a lecture, Diogenes held up some salted fish to divert the audience. When Anaximenes became angry, he said, "An obol's worth of fish has disrupted Anaximenes' lecture!"
(Diogenes Laertius 6.57; G506)

Seeing Anaximenes' servants moving furniture, he asked, "Who does this belong to?" When told it belonged to Anaximenes, he remarked, "Isn't he ashamed to own so much when he doesn't even own himself?"
(Maximus 12.43; G507)

Approaching the stout Anaximenes, he said, "Share a bit of that belly with us beggars; it would lighten your load and bless us."
(Diogenes Laertius 6.57; G506)

Philip of Macedon

After the Battle of Chaironeia, Diogenes was brought before Philip. When asked who he was, he replied, "A spy come to observe your insatiable greed." Philip was impressed and set him free.
(Diogenes Laertius 6.43; G27)

During Philip's campaign against the Greeks, Diogenes, taken as a spy, told him, "Yes, I've come to observe the greed and folly of one about to risk his life and crown on a throw of the dice."
(Plutarch, On Exile 16, 606bc; G27)

After Chaironeia, Diogenes rebuked Philip for his treatment of Athens, pointing out that Philip claimed to be a descendant of Heracles while destroying those who had fought for Heracles' legacy.
(Philostratus, Life of Apollonius 7.2.3; G29)

When Corinth was preparing for a rumored attack by Philip, Diogenes rolled his jar back and forth. Asked why, he replied, "Since everyone's working so hard, it would be unfitting for me to do nothing; so I'm rolling my jar, having nothing else to do."
(Diogenes Laertius 6.69; G26)

Lucian recounts how, with the city in a flurry as Philip approached, Diogenes began rolling his jar up and down. When asked why, he replied, "I'm rolling my jar to avoid seeming idle among all these busy folk."
(Lucian, How to Write History 3; G25)

Diogenes remarked, "Aristotle eats when Philip pleases, but Diogenes eats when Diogenes pleases."
(Plutarch, On Exile 12, 604d; G30)

Alexander the Great

While Diogenes was sunning himself in the Craneion, Alexander offered him any wish. Diogenes replied, “Stand out of my light.”
(Diogenes Laertius 6.38; G33)

When Alexander asked what he wanted, Diogenes answered, “Just move out of my sun.”
(Cicero, Tusculan Disputations 5.32.92; G33)

Alexander was so impressed by Diogenes’ indifference that he told his friends, “If I weren’t Alexander, I’d want to be Diogenes.”
(Plutarch, On Exile 15, 605de; G32)

After a Greek assembly appointed Alexander as leader in the war against Persia, many came to congratulate him. Ignoring Alexander, Diogenes remained in the Craneion, sunning himself. Alexander approached him and asked if he wanted anything. Diogenes replied, “Yes, move out of my sun.” Alexander, struck by his boldness, later remarked, “If I weren’t Alexander, I’d be Diogenes.”
(Plutarch, Life of Alexander 14, 671de; G32)

When Alexander introduced himself as “the Great King,” Diogenes replied, “And I am Diogenes the Dog.”
(Diogenes Laertius 6.60; G34)

When Alexander asked if he feared him, Diogenes replied, “Are you good or bad?” Alexander answered, “Good.” Diogenes then said, “Who fears what is good?”
(Diogenes Laertius 6.68; G40)

As Alexander watched him sleep, he quoted, “To sleep the whole night ill befits a man of counsel,” to which Diogenes, still half-asleep, retorted, “For someone with people to watch over and cares to tend.”
(Epictetus 3.22.92; G39)

Seeing Diogenes sleeping in his jar, Alexander commented, “A jar full of wits,” and Diogenes replied, “Better a drop of fortune than a jar full of wits, for when fortune is absent, wits suffer.”
(Gnomologium Vaticanum 97; G38)

When Diogenes asked Alexander for a coin, Alexander replied, “That’s unworthy of a king.” Diogenes then asked for a talent, to which Alexander replied, “That’s unworthy of a Cynic.”
(Gnomologium Vaticanum 104; G35)

Alexander once sent Diogenes a dish of bones. Diogenes remarked, “A gift fit for a dog, but not for a king.”
(Gnomologium Vaticanum 96; G35)

Diogenes claimed Alexander wasn't content to be a man, but too foolish to become a god.
(Codex Vaticanus Graecus 96, fo. 88v, no. 13; G35b)

When the Athenians voted to honor Alexander as Dionysus, Diogenes said, "Then make me Serapis!"
(Diogenes Laertius 6.63; G36)

Demetrios recorded that Alexander and Diogenes died on the same day: Alexander in Babylon, Diogenes in Corinth, during the 113th Olympiad.
(Diogenes Laertius 6.79; G92)

When someone praised the luxurious life Callisthenes enjoyed in Alexander's retinue, Diogenes replied, "Not at all; he's in a miserable state, for he must eat and drink only when Alexander permits."
(Diogenes Laertius 6.45; G30)

Once, as Alexander sent a letter to Antipater through a man named Athlias, Diogenes, who was present, remarked, "From a wretch, born of a wretch, to a wretch."
(Diogenes Laertius 6.44; G37)

When reproached for accepting a cloak from Antipater, he replied, "The gods' glorious gifts are not to be rejected."
(Diogenes Laertius 6.66; G52)

When Crateros invited him to dine, Diogenes replied, "I'd rather lick salt in Athens than feast at Crateros' table."
(Diogenes Laertius 6.57; G51)

When Perdiccas threatened to kill him if he didn't come to him, Diogenes replied, "That's nothing remarkable; a beetle or tarantula could do as much."
(Diogenes Laertius 6.44; G50)

Dionysios of Syracuse

When Diogenes met Dionysios in Corinth, he told him, "This life of luxury doesn't suit you, Dionysios." Dionysios thanked him for his sympathy, but Diogenes retorted, "Sympathy? No, I'm angry that a person like you, who deserved to age in tyranny like your father, is now living among us in comfort."
(Plutarch, Life of Timoleon 15, 243c; G54)

Diogenes told Dionysios that he didn't deserve his current life of freedom. Instead, he should be walled up in a tyrant's fortress, just as his father was.
(Plutarch, On Whether an Old Man Should Engage in Affairs of State 1, 783cd; G359)

When asked how Dionysios treated his friends, he replied, "Like sacks—he hangs them up when full and discards them when empty."
(Diogenes Laertius 6.50; G53)

When a tyrant asked him which bronze was best for statues, he replied, “The kind used to cast Harmodios and Aristogeiton.”
(Diogenes Laertius 6.50; G358)

The Enslavement

When captured by pirates and sold into slavery, Diogenes displayed great dignity. Sailing to Aegina, he was seized by pirates under Skirpalos and taken to Crete for sale. When the auctioneer asked his skills, he replied, “Governing men.” Pointing to Xeniades, a Corinthian in fine robes, he said, “Sell me to that man; he could use a master.” Xeniades bought him, entrusted his household to him, and praised Diogenes, saying, “A good spirit has entered my home.”
(Diogenes Laertius 6.74–5; G70)

Despite the pirates’ poor treatment, Diogenes kept his spirits high, even remarking, “Isn’t it odd that pigs and sheep for sale are well-fed, but a human, the finest creature, is starved?” He was eventually given food, and when finally sold, he ate cheerfully, quoting a line about Niobe:
“For even Niobe with the beautiful hair remembered to eat,
Although her twelve children had perished in her halls.”
(Philo, That Every Good Man is Free 121–2; G74)

Menippos tells of Diogenes, captured and for sale, being asked what he could do. He replied, “Govern men,” and told the auctioneer to ask if anyone wanted to buy himself a master.
(Diogenes Laertius 6.29; G70)

When told not to sit down while being sold, he replied, “It makes no difference—people buy fish however they’re lying.”
(Diogenes Laertius 6.29; G70)

He found it odd that buyers carefully test pots and plates but are content to merely look over a man.
(Diogenes Laertius 6.30; G70)

Noticing that one potential buyer seemed rather unmanly, Diogenes approached him and said, “Why don’t you buy me? It seems you could use a real man.”
(Philo, That Every Good Man is Free 124; G74)

Diogenes’ spirit and confidence even as a slave impressed his purchaser, Xeniades, who trusted Diogenes to govern his household and educate his children.
(Aulus Gellius, Attic Nights 2.18, 9–10; G77)

Diogenes told Xeniades that he should obey him, even though he was technically his slave, using the analogy that one would still obey a doctor or steersman even if they were slaves.
(Diogenes Laertius 6.30; G70)

When Xeniades quoted, “Backwards flow the streams to their sources,” to defy Diogenes, he replied, “And if you’d bought a doctor, would you refuse his advice for the same reason?”
(Diogenes Laertius 6.36; G70)

Even in slavery, Diogenes displayed remarkable independence and wisdom, reminding those around him that authority in skill trumps social rank. Epictetus noted how Diogenes governed his master, teaching him and his sons, while remaining free in spirit.
(Epictetus 4.1.114–18; G73)

Diogenes the Mentor

According to Cleomenes in *On Pedagogues*, Diogenes’ friends offered to ransom him, but he dismissed the idea as naive, explaining, “Lions are not slaves to those who feed them; rather, it is those who feed them who are slaves to the lions, for fear is what makes one a slave, and wild beasts inspire fear in men.”
(Diogenes Laertius 6.75; G70)

Euboulos, in *Sale of Diogenes*, recounts Diogenes’ methods in educating Xeniades’ sons. Beyond academic subjects, he taught them practical skills: horseback riding, archery, slinging stones, and javelin throwing. At the wrestling school, he allowed them only enough training to stay healthy and fit. They memorized passages from poets, historians, and Diogenes himself, using memory techniques he taught them. At home, he trained them to be self-sufficient, live on simple food, drink water, keep short hair, and dress in only a cloak without shoes. They were to walk silently, not looking around in the streets. He even took them hunting. The boys greatly respected Diogenes and would often ask their parents for favors on his behalf.
(Diogenes Laertius 6.30–1; G70)

The same source notes that Diogenes spent his final years in Xeniades’ household. When Xeniades asked how he wanted to be buried, Diogenes replied, “Face downwards.” When asked why, he explained, “Because soon enough, down will become up,” alluding to the Macedonians’ rise from humble beginnings.
(Diogenes Laertius 6.31–2; G102)

Moralistic Sayings

When he saw a young man blushing, Diogenes encouraged him, saying, “Take courage, for that is the hue of virtue.”
(Diogenes Laertius 6.54; G399)

To a son speaking disrespectfully of his father, he said, “Are you not ashamed to speak poorly of the one who gave you such a high opinion of yourself?”
(Diogenes Laertius 6.65; G396)

He stated that education provides self-control to the young, consolation to the old, a treasure for the poor, and an adornment for the rich.
(Diogenes Laertius 6.68; G380)

When a man brought his well-behaved, talented son to him, Diogenes remarked, “Then what need does he have of me?”
(Diogenes Laertius 6.64; G392)

When a student fell silent after being questioned, Diogenes advised, “It’s essential to know both when to speak and when to stay silent, and toward whom.”
(Stobaeus 3.34.16; G475)

When asked how to be one’s own teacher, he replied, “Start by criticizing in yourself the faults you see in others.”
(Stobaeus 3.1.55; G384)

“If you worry about another, you neglect yourself,” he warned.
(Stobaeus 2.31.61: G315)

Diogenes preferred failure among the wise over success among the unwise.
(Codex Neapolitanus II D 22, no. 51; G378)

When he saw a child misbehaving, he struck the child’s teacher, saying, “Why did you teach him to act this way?”
(Hermogenes, Progymnasmata 3.19; G388)

“Who could be more confident than one who knows he has done no wrong?” he asked.
(Stobaeus 3.24.14; G305)

To an official asking about engaging in public affairs, he replied, “Treat it as fire: don’t stay too close or you’ll get burned, nor too far or you’ll freeze.”
(Maximus 9.26; G357)

When someone criticized him for entering a filthy place, he answered, “The sun enters dung heaps too, yet remains unstained.”
(Diogenes Laertius 6.63; G269)

To an idle man, he said, “If you avoid the hardships of the industrious, you’ll suffer the neglectful’s misfortunes.”
(Codex Patmos 263, no. 68; G331C)

To someone living shamefully while criticizing another for the same thing, he said, “You’re like ashes trying to blow against the wind.”
(John of Sardis, Commentary to Aphthonius’ Progymnasmata p. 40, 11–13; G388)

To a man wearing a lion skin with pride, he said, “Stop disgracing symbols of courage.”
(Diogenes Laertius 6.45; G465)

Diogenes remarked that those who speak well but act poorly are no better than lyres, which can make music but cannot hear it.
(Diogenes Laertius 6.64; G320)

Seeing the Megarians building large walls, he exclaimed, “Fools! You should worry more about the people standing on them than the walls themselves!”
(Stobaeus 3.7.46; G285)

When someone requested a letter of introduction, Diogenes replied, “He’ll know you’re a man when he sees you. If he can tell the good from the bad, he’ll know which you are. If he can’t, no letter will help.”
(Epictetus 2.3.1; G470)

Observing people congratulating a freedman, Diogenes remarked, “It’s absurd, like calling a slave a geometer, musician, or grammarian, expecting him to become one overnight. Freedom, like any skill, doesn’t come by proclamation.”
(Philo, That Every Good Man is Free 157; G445)

On relationships between fathers and sons, Diogenes advised that they shouldn’t wait for one another to ask for something, but should grant it first. The father may resent lack of appreciation, while the son may take things for granted.
(Stobaeus 4.26.23; G394)

To the foolish, truth is bitter while lies are sweet; like diseased eyes that find light painful but welcome the darkness.
(Excerpts from Manuscripts of Florilegia of John Damascene 2.31, 22; G313)

On the Value of Wisdom and Learning

Diogenes found it absurd that people spend on oil for a lamp to see what’s on the table but are reluctant to invest in gaining wisdom to understand what is truly beneficial in life.
(Stobaeus 2.31.74; G316)

He believed we should extract only the valuable parts from books, discarding the rest like bones left for the dogs, keeping only the “marrow” of what is truly useful.
(Codex Neapolitanus II D 22, no. 49; G378)

Diogenes compared dealing with disagreeable people to a doctor using honey to sweeten bitter medicine; the wise use humor to make difficult interactions more bearable.
(Antonius 2.32.61; G330)

He likened child training to a potter molding clay; just as clay can be shaped only while soft, so must children be rigorously guided when young, as later reform is nearly impossible.
(Stobaeus 2.31.87; G382)

Diogenes said that Medea wasn’t a sorceress but a wise woman. She took people weakened by luxury, revitalizing them through exercise and steam baths, which led to legends of her restoring youth.
(Stobaeus 3.29.92; G340)

He observed that most people waste away in baths and excess, only to seek preservation for their bodies after death through embalming—a strange contradiction.
(Stobaeus 3.6.36; G104)

Allies and Adversaries

Diogenes valued a good friend as the best support for anyone facing life's hardships.
(Boissonade, Anecdota Graeca 1, p. 125, 3–4; G417)

To thrive in life, he believed one needs good friends or fierce enemies; friends give guidance, while enemies reveal one's flaws.
(Plutarch, How to Tell a Flatterer from a Friend 36, 74c; G420)

He advised treating friends well to strengthen the friendship and treating enemies well, hoping to turn them into friends, as we should guard against both friends' reproaches and enemies' schemes.
(Codex Vaticanus Graecus 633, fo. 121r; G420)

When asked how best to seek revenge on an enemy, he replied, "By becoming a good and honest person."
(Gnomologium Vaticanum 187; G421)

Hearing that a friend was associating with shady people, he remarked on how people choose good travel companions yet carelessly accept bad company in life.
(Gnomologium Vaticanum 197; G415)

Diogenes used to say that a friend should be approached with open hands, not clenched fists.
(Diogenes Laertius 6.29; G277)

Seeing a rich man with a poor friend, he asked why one was impoverished and the other wealthy if they were truly friends.
(Codex Patmos 263, no. 66; G246C)

When warned that his friends were scheming against him, he replied, "What would life be if we had to treat friends and enemies the same?"
(Diogenes Laertius 6.68; G419)

To him, a person who accepts slander against a friend is no better than the slanderer.
(Boissonade, Anecdota Graeca 1, p. 125, 5–6; G418)

When someone reported that a friend had insulted him, he replied, "It's uncertain if my friend said it, but it's certain you've told me."
(Gnomologium Monacense Latinum 24.3; G438)

Seeing a wolf observe shepherds eating a sheep, Diogenes imagined the wolf thinking, "Imagine the fuss they'd make if I did that!"
(Antonius 1.39.55; G471)

About Journeys

On one journey, Diogenes came to a river and was unsure how to cross. A man skilled in ferrying noticed his predicament and helped him over. Diogenes initially felt gratitude but later dismissed it, realizing the man ferried everyone across without thought for character —"You must be out of your mind," he thought, "if you help everyone without discretion." *(Aesop, Fables 65; G331)*

Reflections of a Cynic Sage

Asked what is most precious in life, he replied, "Hope."
(Stobaeus 4.46.20; G329)

When asked the most difficult thing, he said, "To know oneself, for self-love blinds us to our flaws."
(Maximus 69.18; G308)

To him, the most miserable state was an old age without resources.
(Diogenes Laertius 6.51; G84)

When asked to define a friend, he described, "One soul in two bodies."
(Stobaeus 2.33.10; G416)

On being asked where the Muses dwell, he answered, "In the souls of cultivated people."
(Papyrus Michigan inv. 41.l.6–7; G387)

Diogenes viewed an uncultivated person as a heavy burden on the earth.
(Stobaeus 2.31.75; G377)

He believed an uncultured person's influence is weightier than lead or gold.
(Codex Vaticanus Graecus 633, fo. 121v; G377)

Asked what ages fastest, he replied, "Gratitude."
(Stobaeus 2.46.13; G328)

To the question of why gold appears pale, he replied, "Because so many covet it."
(Diogenes Laertius 6.51; G227)

He said the most vicious creature is a slanderer, and among tame creatures, a flatterer.
(Maximus 11.31; G423)

On the most dangerous animals, he said, "In the mountains, lions and bears; in cities, tax-collectors and informers."
(Maximus 22.20; G424)

Diogenes thought it preferable to fall prey to crows, which devour the dead, than to flatterers, who consume the living.
(Athenaeus 6, 245c; G425)

Those who have beauty but lack cultivation, he compared to perfume jars filled with vinegar.

The Illusions of Wealth and Status

Diogenes observed that flattery is like an inscription on a gravestone: it bears the name of friendship but lacks its substance.
(Stobaeus 3.14.14; G422)

He compared education to a golden crown, bringing honor at a high price.
(Stobaeus 2.31.92; G381)

Boastfulness, to him, was like armor gilded with gold: impressive outside, but hollow within.
(Stobaeus 3.22.40; G306)

A rich man lacking wisdom he called a "sheep with golden fleece."
(Diogenes Laertius 6.47; G232)

Seeing an uncultivated rich man, he quipped, "Behold, the golden sheep!"
(Codex Vaticanus Graecus 633, fo. 115v; G379)

When he encountered a wealthy but uncultured youth, he called him "silver-plated filth."
(Theon, Progymnasmata 5.97; G388)

Diogenes rebuked a handsome youth who spoke crudely, saying, "Aren't you ashamed to draw a dull blade from a fine scabbard?"
(Diogenes Laertius 6.65; G411)

Good people, he considered to be living images of the gods.
(Diogenes Laertius 6.51; G354)

He once remarked to a man of poor character that he was "scrubbing an Ethiopian to turn him white," suggesting the futility of trying to reform him.
(Antonius 2.32.60; G385)

"Trying to teach a bad man," he said, "is as pointless as curing a corpse."
(Maximus 16.12; G383)

Humor

Seeing two women gossiping, he remarked, “The adder borrows poison from the viper.”
(Maximus 39.15; G204)

Watching a girl learn to write, he said, “I see a sword being sharpened.”
(Gnomologium Parisinum 4)

Observing a woman being carried in a litter, he quipped, “Not the right cage for that beast!”
(Diogenes Laertius 6.51; G203)

Seeing women hanging from a tree, he said, “If only all trees bore such fruit!”
(Diogenes Laertius 6.52; G202)

When told of a woman being carried away by a river, he replied, “Let evil be carried off by evil!”
(Inscription at Herculaneum, no. 264 Della Corte; G206)

Asked what is bad in life, he replied, “A beautiful woman.”
(Gnomologium Vaticanum 189; G201)

When he saw a woman with one eye, he joked, “That’s what they call a half-evil.”
(Codex Vaticanus Graecus 96, fo. 88v, no. 7; G206B)

Upon seeing an Ethiopian eating white bread, he remarked, “The night devours the day!”
(Papyrus Sorbonne 826, no. 4; G466)

Witty remarks

Seeing an incompetent archer, Diogenes sat beside the target, saying, “Just to make sure I don’t get hit.”
(Diogenes Laertius 6.67; G455)

To a musician who always cleared the room with his singing, he said, “Greetings, chanticleer! You crow, and everyone gets up.”
(Diogenes Laertius 6.48; G454)

Once, a poor lyre-player was criticized by many, yet praised by Diogenes, who said, “For a man his size, it’s a blessing he’s not a thief.”
(Diogenes Laertius 6.47; G453)

When a long reader pointed to the blank space at the end of his scroll, Diogenes called out, “Take heart, everyone, I see land!”
(Diogenes Laertius 6.38; G391)

Entering a classroom filled with statues but few pupils, he remarked, “Teacher, you have plenty of students, thanks to the gods!”
(Diogenes Laertius 6.69; G389)

Seeing a failed wrestler practicing medicine, he laughed and said, “Planning to bring down those who once bested you?”
(Diogenes Laertius 6.62; G447)

When asked why athletes seem dull, he answered, “Because they’re built up from swine and oxen.”
(Diogenes Laertius 6.49; G446)

When insulted by a bald man, Diogenes responded, “I won’t insult you, but I congratulate your hair for fleeing such an evil head.”
(Maximus 10.24; G458)

Upon being told that someone spoke ill of him, he replied, “That’s no surprise—he never learned to speak well.”
(Gnomologium Vaticanum 179; G429)

To a critic, he said, “As no one would believe me if I praised you, no one will believe you if you disparage me.”
(Gnomologium Vaticanum 186; G426)

When someone accused him of drunken nonsense, he answered, “And you think I’m nonsensical when sober?”
(Codex Vaticanus Graecus 1144, fo. 216v; G433)

Hearing that someone spoke dreadful things about him, Diogenes remarked, “And he’s welcome to strike me too, if I’m not there.”
(Codex Ottobonianus Graecus 192, fo. 206v; G432)

When struck by a plank and told, “Watch out!” he retorted, “What, are you going to hit me again?” Alternatively, he hit the person back and echoed, “Watch out!” *(Diogenes Laertius 6.41, 6.66; G457)*

After being punched, he mused, “Heracles! I forgot to wear a helmet.” *(Diogenes Laertius 6.41; G456)*

Meidias, after assaulting Diogenes, promised a 3,000-drachma fine. The next day, Diogenes wrapped his hand, beat Meidias, and said, “There’s 3,000 for you!” *(Diogenes Laertius 6.42; G483)*

When asked what he’d want for a punch on the head, Diogenes replied, “A helmet.”
(Diogenes Laertius 6.54; G456)

Seeing the son of a prostitute throwing stones, he warned, “Take care not to hit your father!” *(Diogenes Laertius 6.62; G211)*

Observing a lad hurling stones at a gibbet, he said, “Good choice, you’re sure to hit your mark.” *(Diogenes Laertius 6.45; G413)*

When a youth acted wildly, he joked, “Your father must have been drunk when he begot you.” *(Plutarch, On the Education of Children 3, 2a; G395)*

Watching someone enamored with a wealthy older woman, he commented, “He’s not cast his eye on her, but sunk his teeth in her.” *(Stobaeus 3.10.60; G239)*

Noting an old woman beautifying herself, he quipped, “If it’s for the living, you’re mad; if for the dead, don’t delay.” *(Maximus 41.26; G217)*

To a married man with an inscription over his door claiming virtue, Diogenes added, “After conflict, alliance.” *(Diogenes Laertius 6.50; G347)*

Acting as a judge between two rogues, he decided, “One is certainly a thief, and the other has lost nothing.” *(Diogenes Laertius 6.54; G461)*

Seeing a hunchback approach, he exclaimed, “I thought you were carrying something!” *(Gnomologium Vaticanum 199; G460)*

When chided for leaving a brothel, he retorted, “Should I have been coming out of your house?” *(Codex Bodleianus 50, fo. 108r, no. 6; G211B)*

On seeing a filthy bath-house, he asked, “After bathing here, where do people go to wash?” *(Diogenes Laertius 6.47; G268)*

Observing that Megarian children went barefoot while sheep wore coats, he remarked, “It’s better to be a Megarian ram than a Megarian’s son.” *(Diogenes Laertius 6.41; G284)*

Noticing a young man lounging carelessly, he warned, “Wake up, lest someone fix a spear in your back!” *(Diogenes Laertius 6.53; G499)*

Seeing a man caught stealing purple dye, he said, “Purple death has claimed him.” *(Diogenes Laertius 6.57; G495)*

Observing a man buying expensive food, he commented, “By what you buy, you’re doomed to a swift death.” *(Diogenes Laertius 6.53; G493)*

Seeing a runaway slave by a well, he cautioned, “Careful, or you’ll end up inside!” *(Diogenes Laertius 6.52; G443)*

Seeing an Olympic victor now pasturing sheep, he said, “How swiftly you’ve gone from Olympia to Nemea!” *(Diogenes Laertius 6.49; G448)*

These sayings of Diogenes reflect his knack for irony, straightforwardness, and his unique brand of humor grounded in observation and wit. They underscore his disdain for pretense, hypocrisy, and the self-deceiving nature of social status.

Diogenes' perspective on age, death, and the value of life highlights his unwavering commitment to self-sufficiency and disregard for social conventions.

Aging

When told he should slow down in old age, he compared life to a race, saying he'd strive even harder as he neared the end. *(Diogenes Laertius 6.34; G83)*

Diogenes mocked physical limitations with humor; when a man used his weakness to force him back, he pointed at a column, saying, "There, throw that over!" *(Teles 10.6–11.1; G469)*

Suicide

A scoffer once suggested that Diogenes end his life to escape suffering, but Diogenes asserted that the knowledgeable should live. He implied the ignorant, like his scoffer, would benefit more from death. *(Aelian, Historical Miscellany 10.11; G81)*

Diogenes offered his friend Antisthenes a dagger to escape illness. Antisthenes responded, "I said from my sufferings, not from my life!" *(Diogenes Laertius 6.18; G24)*

Death and Burial

He questioned the fear of death, arguing that one can't suffer if they aren't aware of it. *(Diogenes Laertius 6.68; G87)*

On being close to death, he told his doctor he felt "none at all," saying, "the one brother [sleep] is forestalling the other [death]." *(Plutarch, Consolation to Apollonius 12, 107e; G88)*

When asked who would carry him for burial if he died in a tavern, he said, "The inn's owner." *(Gnomologium Vaticanum 200; G442)*

Diogenes preferred to be cast out for wild beasts to share his remains or thrown into a river, highlighting his disregard for ritual burial. *(Diogenes Laertius 6.79; G101)*

When asked what would prevent dogs from desecrating him in death, he replied that if he couldn't feel it, it wouldn't harm him. *(Cicero, Tusculan Disputations 1.43.104; G105)*

Different tales about his death suggest he died by holding his breath, a symbolic assertion of control over his life's end. *(Diogenes Laertius 6.76–8)*

Diogenes reportedly died at the age of ninety after eating a raw octopus or choking on it, his bold gesture to prove life's simplicity. *(Plutarch, On the Eating of Meat 1.6, 995cd; G93)*

Nearing death from fever en route to the Olympics, he refused assistance and declared, "This night will prove me victor or vanquished." *(Jerome, Against Jovinian 5.17; G99)*

These anecdotes underscore Diogenes' defiance against weakness, his control over life's final act, and his indifference to death's conventional treatment. His responses to mortality reflect his belief that a life lived by reason and independence was worth continuing, while empty conventions, even in death, were to be dismissed.